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ABSTRACT

Since very little investigation has been made of stories told in organizations, a pilot study was designed to examine story types, values, and recurring themes in stories of a regional planning agency employing 21 staff members. In order to collect stories, tape recorded interviews were conducted with each staff member. Open-ended questions designed to elicit stories were used in these interviews. After stories were identified, they were subjected to content analysis. Study results showed that members told more relational than task stories, suggesting that members interpreted and assigned meanings to their work world through their relationships with other members. In addition, the stories reflected several common themes reflecting organizational concerns such as equality, security, and control. However, a number of concerns unique to the organization also emerged through common story themes. These centered on specific persons, relationships, and practices related to the agency. The findings support the notion that story telling does occur in conversations with organizational members and that common themes recur in these stories. (HOD)

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Work Relationships and Relational Stories

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Abstract

Although stories are frequently told in organizations, little empirical work examining them has been conducted. Thus, this area of organizational life is as of yet relatively unexplored. This research is a pilot study designed to examine story types, values, and recurring themes. The study reported here was conducted in a regional planning agency employing 21 staff members. In order to collect stories, tape recorded interviews were conducted with each staff member. Open-ended questions designed to elicit stories were used in these interviews. After stories were identified, they were subjected to content analysis. Findings yielded a higher number of relational than task stories (Brown, 1983). In addition, the stories reflected several common themes reflecting organizational concerns, but Martin's et al. (1983) typology was not validated. Stories about equality, security and control were told, but not all stories could be classified using this system. A typology was developed according to the emergent story themes in this particular organization.

Work Relationships and Relational Stories[1]

Organizations have been studied from a number of different perspectives and with emphasis on a variety of phenomena. One recent approach to the study of organizations is from an interpretivist framework. Although this framework has historical roots (Deetz, 1982), it is a relative newcomer to the field of organizational communication. A strength of this approach is its focus on the totality of communication in an organization. It brings into focus more than just the work aspects of organizational life and looks beyond how to make the system run effectively and efficiently. Instead, it considers all aspects of communication within the organization. It is through such an approach that we can truly gain a deeper understanding of organizational life.

Because the interpretive framework goes beyond work-centered activities, a number of previously unexplored phenomena are examined. In organizations, numerous occurrences are unrelated to the job. Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo (1982) state that "people in organizations also gossip, joke, knife one another, initiate romantic involvements, cue new employees to ways of doing the least amount of work that still avoids hassles from a supervisor, talk sports, arrange picnics" (p. 116). The interpretive approach allows for emphasis on such activities.

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[1]This research is based on a Master's thesis completed at the University of Kentucky.

For example, various researchers have called for a focus on such phenomena as rites and rituals (Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Martin, 1982; Pacanowsky & O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1982), and stories (Brown, 1983; Martin, 1982; Pacanowsky & O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1982).

While folklorists and anthropologists have examined story usage and function during this century (Georges, 1969), organizational communication researchers are just beginning to examine their importance. Mitroff and Kilmann (1975) assert that "if accounting and finance are the backbone of organizations, then the stories which permeate all organizations of any size are their lifeblood" (p. 18). These researchers further argue that "stories are so central to organizations that not only do organizations depend on them, but stronger still, they couldn't function without them" (p. 18). Despite their importance, it has only been recently that stories have begun to be examined.

Although little actual research has been conducted, several researchers address the issue of organizational stories and focus our attention on their importance. For example, Martin (1982) asserts that implicit forms of communication, such as stories, function to help organizational members learn about the culture, philosophies, and policies of a particular organization. She argues that implicit communication is more memorable and credible than explicit. Siehl and Martin (1982) further argue that cultural norms and values are transmitted by indirect means such

as organizational stories. They contend that stories are a more "memorable and credible means of communicating the shared values of an organization" (Siehl & Martin, 1982, p. 30) than explicit forms of communication. Dandridge, Mitroff, and Joyce (1980) posit that organizational symbolism mirrors values and beliefs that reside in an organization's culture. Stories are one such form of symbolic representation.

Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo (1982) add that stories are used to "substantiate organizational knowledge or pass on the unrecorded traditions or customs of organizational life" (p. 126). They contend that organizational members share experiences through stories. Hawes (1974) argues that stories aid organizational members in sense-making. Faules (1982) agrees that stories are "used to give meaning to critical events" (p. 151). They are considered a way of organizing events into logical sequences. Faules (1982) says that "participants use stories to determine what organizational events and activities mean" (p. 151) and Brown (1984) says "stories appear to have the power to take an incident, frame and freeze it, and transmit the incident to organizational members in a memorable, recognizable package with implications for the present, past, and future of life within that organization" (p. 14). Cirourel (1972) also maintains that stories function to clarify past occurrences and to provide a framework for interpreting future incidents.

According to Martin (1982), it is impossible to work in an organization and not be exposed to organizational stories. She argues that stories are frequently told in "company-related, casual conversations" (Martin, 1982, p. 256). Stories are told in both formal and informal settings. These stories may focus on present or past employees or the management (Martin, 1982).

In his research on understanding and recall, Bower (1976) proposes characteristics that distinguish stories from other narratives. He believes that stories are characterized by a particular structure. This structure includes the setting, plot, characters, and episodes. These individual parts form a coherent story which is set in the organization and has characters who are organizational members (Martin, 1982).

In her examination of stories, Martin (1982) distinguishes between stories, myths, and sagas. Stories relate a single true episode. Myths are similar to stories except that their truth is questioned or unlikely. Sagas are collections of stories that contain information about the past. In addition, folklore is defined as a collection of stories. According to Martin and Powers (1981), organizational research thus far points to the likelihood that "organizational stories may serve many of the same functions that anthropologists have found myths to serve in tribal societies" (p. 7).

Martin (1982) advocates viewing organizational stories from a scriptal perspective. She details the relationship between

scripts and stories. A script is a sequence of expected events. According to Martin (1982), scripts act to "reduce the information processing requirements made of peoples' limited-capacity minds" (p. 283). She compares activating a particular script to putting a plane on automatic pilot. Martin (1982) believes that stories are built around scripts. In this viewpoint, scripts are the "essential core" on which stories are constructed. The essence of a story is in the unique details. Once the unique details are removed, only a script remains. Martin (1982) argues that the scriptal roots of stories aid in remembrance.

In addition to these characteristics, stories almost always have morals (Bower, 1976; Martin, 1982). Martin (1982) defines a moral as "a general rule, an abstract inference drawn from a narrative description of a single incident or series of incidents" (p. 281). She adds that organizational members most likely remember stories because of their recommendations and directions for behaviors. Martin (1982) states that "stories should be remembered and believed because they are used to develop general rules, or morals, concerning what will happen, should an incident, similar to that described in the story, occur in the future" (p. 281). Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo (1982) agree that stories may "signify possible future scenarios of organizational life" (p. 126).

Wilkins (1979) found that organizational members can, in general, verbalize the moral of a story after telling it.

Generally, culture, management philosophy, and organizational policy or practice are central in the moral. Martin (1982) concluded that in organizations where commitment is high, morals tend to reflect favorably on the organization.

Siehl and Martin (1982) further examined the role of organizational stories in their research on how organizational culture is learned. After conducting interviews in a particular organization, the researchers summarized four key stories. The stories were analyzed for their moral. After determination of the moral, two substitute, but incorrect, morals were devised. Organizational members were then presented with a summarized version of the story and the three morals. Members were asked to choose the correct moral. This choice situation was one part of a five section questionnaire. From their research, Siehl and Martin (1982) assert that organizational stories and the interpretation of them is part of a sequence of learning organizational culture. Knowledge about organizational stories comes midway through the sequence. Special jargon is learned first. Then, organizational members become aware of and learn organizational stories and how to interpret them.

According to Siehl and Martin (1982), organizational members are moderately familiar with stories after eight weeks in an organization. Siehl and Martin (1982) believe that story knowledge comes before tacit knowledge. In their research,

organizational members become familiar with story content and interpretation before becoming familiar with tacit and more complex forms of knowledge, such as common management language. While tacit knowledge is beginning to develop, stories are likely to be understood already by organizational members (Siehl & Martin, 1982).

In her research, Brown (1983) examined linkages between stories and one's level of socialization into an organization. Her findings show that as members pass through socialization stages, story telling changes with regard to frequency and use. During the entry phase, fewer stories were told than during the three later phases. As time in an organization increased, members became progressively better able to articulate (verbalize) the relationship between activities and impact through stories. For example, members in the third or "role-management stage" of socialization used morals to explain story meanings. In the fourth stage of socialization called "stabilization," organizational members most frequently blended several stories into one aggregate story. Brown (1983) asserted that this occurs in the stabilization phase because these members "are capable of taking like sets of events and merging them into a single narrative" (p. 19). Brown (1983) argues that "story form changes show an increased understanding of how events impact on the organization" (p. 34). She calls for further studies exploring the relationship between

storytelling and organizational socialization.

A few researchers have looked at the relationship between stories and commitment. Wilkins (1978) concluded that stories are told in greater frequency when employees are more committed. In addition, in organizations where levels of commitment are high, story content sheds a favorable light on the organization. Martin and Powers (1981) also examined the role of stories in producing commitment. These experiments were conducted by having subjects read stories with different endings and then make predictions about a particular organization. In addition, these stories contained either statistical content or story content. Subjects were asked whether they had developed positive or negative feelings about the organization from reading the stories. Their findings indicate that "stories caused commitment" and that "stories caused more commitment than other means of communicating information, such as statistics" (p. 18). Martin and Powers (1981) argue that "case examples, such as organizational stories, have strong impact on these attitudes as well as on cognitions" (p. 18).

Martin, Feldman, Hat, and Sitkin (1983) describe seven common types of organizational stories:

1. What do I do when a higher status person breaks a rule?
2. Is the boss human?
3. Can the little person rise to the top?

4. Will I be fired?
5. Will the organization help me if I have to move?
6. How will the boss react to mistakes?
7. How will the organization deal with obstacles?

Each story type has an underlying script. It is according to this script that organizational happenings and characters are arranged. In addition, these authors presented positive and negative versions of each story type. Martin and co-workers (1983) asserted that these seven story types were most prevalent due to three dualities--equality vs. inequality, security vs. insecurity, control vs. lack of control. They argued that organizational members tell stories to help answer questions surrounding these concerns. Thus, they concluded that these story types are not necessarily unique features of an organization.

In her research, Brown (1983) examined story subject matter and labeled stories as relational or task. She defined a relational story as one that "deals with the impact of a focal person, another person, or group can have upon the organizational member" (p. 9). A task story "refers to an influence set containing the various organizational goals, resources, and rules of the organization as well as those elements necessary to perform a task" (Brown, 1983, p. 9). In an examination of stories told by nursing home employees, Brown (1983) found many more task stories than relational stories. She argued that this

finding could result from the particular type of organization studied, i.e., the patient is the task and thus, the task-relational distinction is a bit fuzzy. She argued that this also could be due to organizational members' hesitation to discuss relationships with the interviewer and their comfort with simply talking about their jobs.

Although stories have been given some attention in this recent adoption of interpretive positions, little empirical work involving stories has actually been done. Several researchers speak of the importance of organizational stories, yet little is known about their content, type, and frequency. This study describes key images and themes that organizational members describe in stories. Values perpetuated by these stories are also of interest. In addition, this study examines typologies previously developed to code stories.

The purpose of this study is to explore how stories perpetuate organizational values. It was designed as a pilot study for further investigations of the relationship of stories to organizational outcomes such as commitment and shared understandings. Qualitative methods were chosen for this study in an effort to describe organizational culture and the members' interpretation of it. Because this is a preliminary study, descriptive techniques were designed to discover the substance of organizational culture which Martin (1982) contends is best understood through

qualitative methods that yield rich and detailed data.

In this study, key story themes and values were examined through in-depth, probing interviews. Reoccurring images in organizational stories were of primary interest. The research questions posited include the following:

R_1 What types of stories are told?

R_2 Are common story topics found in this organization?

R_3 What images and themes recur in the stories told in a nonprofit service organization?

R_4 What values do these stories illustrate?

These research questions focus on describing organizational stories. Because this is a preliminary study, no specific hypotheses are suggested.

Methodology

This section provides background information about the organization and the participants in this study. It also discusses the specific design of this research. Information is provided concerning analyses and reliabilities.

The Organization Studied

The organization in this study is an eight-county regional planning agency funded by local, state and federal grants. It is one of 15 such organizations in its state and one of several hundred across the country. According to a self-produced brochure, the organization's major purpose is to improve the

"quality of life" in these counties. The major responsibility of staff members is to review proposed projects and make recommendations for future projects in these eight counties. Examples of such projects include bridges, parks, hospitals, and road improvements. In addition, this agency serves a linking function for the people living in its geographical area. In order to fulfill this function, several publications are produced and distributed. The bulk of this distribution occurs through mail.

The organizational staff is headed by an executive director. This individual supervises the daily activities of the agency. With the exception of support staff, the organization can be subdivided into four specialized divisions--employment training services, community and economic development services, management services, and human services. These four divisions have separate, but related, goals. Approximately five staff members work in each division. The staff members are well-trained and highly educated in their particular area of work.

Prior to and at the time of this study the organization was in a period of change. Staff size was almost doubled. In addition, a new executive director had been selected and had taken office.

Study Participants

All twenty of the staff members are represented in this study. There are 7 males and 13 females. One staff member, who

was hired after the study began, is not included in these results. Of the 20 staff members, six could be labeled as supervisors.

Procedure

Each member of the planning agency staff was interviewed. These interviews, conducted by a team of researchers trained in interviewing techniques, were recorded on audio cassette. Each interviewer followed a specific interview guide. Questions posed to interviewees were open-ended. Interviewers probed for stories and asked three questions using the word story or example.

Data collection was conducted in a one month period on their time and in their offices. Interviews ranged from 15 minutes to 2½ hours. An average interview was 45 minutes. Following the data collection, stories were identified and transcribed from the cassettes.

Measures

Open-ended and in-depth interviewing questions were used to give interviewees an opportunity to express their opinions about the organization in detail and at whatever length they chose. This method of data collection is consistent with that called for by Martin (1982) and O'Donnell-Trujillo (1982).

Analysis

After identification and transcription of the organizational stories, the stories were content analyzed. In the analysis, key terms and themes that appeared in the stories were described.

The researcher described how these stories were indicative of organizational values.

In addition, story data were analyzed according to two proposed typologies for stories. The first of these was devised by Brown (1983). Brown (1983) examines story subject matter and labels stories as relational or task. She defines a relational story as one that "deals with the impact the focal person, another person, or group can have upon the organizational member" (p. 9). A task story "refers to an influence set containing the various organizational goals, resources, and rules of the organization as well as those elements necessary to perform a task" (Brown, 1983, p. 9). Two independent coders analyzed the recorded texts for Brown's story types. Agreement on story type was approximately 86%. Any disagreements between the two coders were resolved through deliberation and negotiation to 100% agreement.

The second typology was developed by Martin et al. (1983). They organize stories according to three underlying dualities or concerns for organizational members--equality vs. inequality, security vs. insecurity, and control vs. lack of control. Martin et al. (1983) assert that there are seven basic story types that occur due to these dualities.

In the analysis by story duality or concern, intercoder agreement was 19%. Reasons for this low figure will be examined in the next sections.

In summary, methodologies common to interpretive research are different than those previously used. Such methods allow us to uncover data which would otherwise go unnoticed. Results obtained from this study are presented in the next section.

Results

In this section, findings are reviewed according to research questions. First, story types are discussed. Second, results according to story topics are reviewed. Third, recurring images and themes are examined. Each section includes the number and type of stories in each coding scheme.

Story Type

The 111 stories related by organizational members during interviews were coded using Brown's (1983) relational and task subject matter coding scheme. This coding scheme was chosen because of the information it can reveal about the nature of organizational stories. It indicates whether members placed a higher value on relational or task information. Through this scheme, we can learn where members' values center. In addition, it is one of few existing coding schemes for stories. This study yielded approximately 64% (N=71) relational stories and approximately 36% (N=40) task stories. The significance of the large number of relational stories is discussed in the next section.

The following is an example of a relational story:

> See what happened was--this was a statement made when he was assistant executive director, then he became executive director. You know about the statement about females that we were saying, this might be true this might not be true. He immediately promotes all the key people he needed on his side. In the transition before he was accepted as the executive director, there was widespread rumor and dissent, almost. Then his first thing was to promote these people that--that just calmed the swell of emotion, you know. It just gave people something else to say, you know, "Well, how can I be mad at this man who is promoting me?" It was the key people he needed.

The story above is clearly a relational story because it centers on the impact of a key organizational member. This particular story focuses on how actions by a particular member influence thinking and behavior.

An example of a task story is:

> Like even the meeting room when I first came here, back in the conference room they had a just kind of schedule and everybody was suppose to write back there when they were - when they wanted the conference room. Well, there'd be like overlapping conflicts with different meetings going on and stuff like that, so that I moved the meeting list up front, because I was the receptionist at the time. Then I made up a new one and I had the calendar up there with the dates and everything and then I put down the regular meetings that we would usually have and once a month written on there so that everybody would know that those were taken on a regular basis. You know, like the staff meeting, and the executive committee board, the second Tuesday and the third Thursday and things like that. I'd go ahead and write all that. Then if anybody asked they could just call me, and say "Hey, [name omitted] is such and such a date taken?" Then I would fill in the calendar and stuff like that so there wouldn't be as much conflict involved. Which, I thought was a good idea on my part, but I didn't get any kind of pat on the back for it.

The story above was coded as a task story because it involves procedures and rules for organizational behavior. It focuses on tasks, rather than on the impact of any person or group.

Discussion of these findings follows in the next section.

Common Story Topics

These same 111 organizational stories were coded according to a scheme proposed by Martin et al. (1983). This typology asserts that stories occur due to three dualities or concerns among organizational members--equality vs. inequality, security vs. insecurity, and control vs. lack of control. This coding scheme was chosen in order to determine if Martin's et al. assertion that these three dualities underlie stories across all organizations was valid.

According to Martin et al. (1983), stories centering on an equality concern "express that discomfort and present situations in which equality among people could emerge" (p. 19). Stories dealing with security "express the insecurity created by being in a situation in which actions of an individual (the boss) of the organization can substantially alter one's entire life" (Martin et al., 1983, p. 20). In stories dealing with control "positive versions . . . reassure listeners that unforeseen events can be controlled while the negative versions express the difficulties posed by a lack of control" (Martin et al., 1983, p. 21).

Using Martin's et al. (1983) three duality coding scheme, independent coders found low interrater agreement (19%). In their original article, Martin et al. (1983) do not report reliability figures, thus we are left with unanswered questions about how and whether to use this coding scheme. While these

data do not dispute their assertion that the three dualities exist, they do point to problems in detailing particular themes embedded within stories and they do reveal the difficulties in differentiating organizational stories on these dimensions. The next section further explores this notion.

Recurring Images and Themes

In the interview guide, three follow-up questions specifically asked for stories or examples. These questions were designed to elicit stories and examples relevant to the establishment of goals, the process of decision-making, and methods of handling conflicts. Responses revealed 13 goal-related stores, 11 decision-making stories, and 21 conflict stories. In addition to these stories, several others were shared by organizational members. Other key issues and themes that emerged in these stories were supervisory relationships (N=16), descriptions of routine or daily activity (N=12), self-compliment (N=8), hiring practices (N=6), grapevine (N=7), morale (N=4), and internal memos (N=4). Other issues addressed by more than one person were deadlines and external communication.

These data were also analyzed according to story moral. Martin (1982) views story morals as the underlying assertion or statement a story is making. Nine categories of morals, incorporating 97 stories, emerged. The following table shows categories and number of stories per category (see Table 1). The morals of fourteen stories were unable to be coded by this scheme.

Insert table 1 about here

In summary, results of this study reveal more relational than task information stories told by organizational members. Findings also indicate the presence of all three of Martin et al.'s (1983) common story topics. However, not all stories fall into her three common types. In a breakdown by morals, nine categories emerged. The significance of these findings is examined in the next section.

Discussion

This study provided an opportunity to conduct much needed story research. Story-telling is an integral part of organizational life, and stories reveal much about existing culture. The study sheds light on the nature and type of stories existing within this non-profit organization. These results provide insight into the present organizational reality.

The fourth research question (i.e., what values do these stories illustrate) examines the values perpetuated in these stories. From the results of the first three research questions previously presented, we can make a number of generalizations about the members of this organization and their organizational reality. Results from the first three research questions will be examined in order to determine what values they are perpetuating.

Story Type

Study results showed that members of this organization told more relational than task stories. This finding suggests that organizational members interpret and assign meanings to their work world through their relationships with other members. In organizations such as this one, such a finding is not altogether surprising since the nature of their work demands coordination which is achieved through interaction.

Data for the present study were collected in a non-profit organization in which there is a heavy focus on relationships and cooperation. In this organization, work can only be accomplished through interacting with others. Their "task" (in a sense) is relationships with other people. This emphasis and value is evidenced in these and other stories told by organizational employees. The survival of this organization depends in part on its ability to develop and maintain smooth and comfortable interpersonal relationships with others. It is through personal relationships that organizational members accomplish their tasks. Without these relationships the organization could not continue.

Findings from Brown's (1983) study were just the opposite from this one. She reports more task than relational stories. This suggests differences between these two organizations. Brown (1983) generalizes that task stories occurred more frequently than relational because of the type of organization studied

(i.e., health care--patient is task). It would seem that in Brown's (1983) organization task stories are more prevalent because people are "tasks." The members of the focal organization of this study greatly value relationships and speak of these often in stories; thus, members of these two organizations hold different values in their work worlds.

The three months of intense contact with organizational members during the course of this study provided an opportunity to observe behavior and record conversations. The heavy focus on relationships was evidenced throughout the study's course. Members frequently described their relationships with other organizational members, their relationships with relevant others outside the organization, and relationships between other insiders or outsiders. They focused both on "good" and "bad" relationships. Study participants frequently said that the relationships among staff members made the organization an attractive place in which to work.

Common Story Topics

When breaking down findings according to Martin's et al. (1983) typology, equality, security, and control are all concerns in this organization. This suggests that Martin and co-workers (1983) may have pinpointed three dualities that underlie organizational stories. Martin et al. (1983) argue that stories are not in actuality unique to particular organizations, but rather are permeated by similar concerns and themes. These

findings add support to this notion. However, these three concerns may only represent a few of the common themes in organizational stories.

In an analysis by these dualities, little agreement was found between coders. Although coders agreed that these issues were present in some stories, difficulty existed in limiting decisions to the existence of one concern per story. Quite often story content was laced with two or even all three of these organizational issues. A second problem was the relatively large number of stories that did not fit into any of the three categories.

While the presence of Martin's et al. three dualities was validated, a number of other stories were told which could not be coded according to this scheme. This suggests that Martin and her co-workers have identified three macro issues which may be evidenced across organizations, but that individual organizations are likely to have their own micro concerns.

Recurring Images and Themes

In addition to Martin's et al. (1983) macro organizational issues, study findings point to micro concerns in other areas. These concerns are evidenced in the themes (e.g., conflict, supervisors) which recurred in the organizational stories. Although the interview guide asked for stories or examples about three issues (goals, decision-making, conflict), numerous other stories were told (see Table 1). The interview guide provided

structure across the interviews and yet remained general enough so that respondents could insert stories at any point. It is these stories that members related without prompting that illustrate concerns in this organization.

Analyses of these stories allow us to make at least four generalizations about the existing reality in this organization. First, organizational members place emphasis on relationships with others. They talk quite frequently about and provide details about how they interact with others. The type of work performed by this agency may attract those who are interested in coordination and cooperation or the perception of such. In general, people who enjoy and are successful at communicating with others are more likely to apply for and maintain positions in an agency such as this one.

Second, concerns that generally plague organizations also are evidenced in this agency. Members in the organization studied voice concerns about equality, security, and control. Thus, Martin's et al. (1983) assertion that these three dualities are issues of general concern is validated in this study. However, a number of other issues emerged.

Third, a number of concerns more unique to this organization are evidenced through common story themes. These concerns center on specific persons, relationships, and practices in this agency.

Fourth, and most generally, this study contributes to our understanding of the phenomenon of organizational story-telling.

We see that story-telling does occur in conversations with organizational members and that common themes recur in these stories.

Limitations

Despite the strengths of this study, there are also some limitations. They arise primarily from the story coding systems used. The typologies of Martin and Brown provided a framework for analyzing results, yet they suffer from several inherent problems. Both schemes used for coding (Brown, 1933; Martin, 1983) need revision.

The use of Brown's (1983) typology places limitations upon the study. Problems exist in Brown's (1983) definitions of relational versus task stories. Brown (1983) defines relational stories as dealing "with the impact the focal person, another person, or group can have upon the organizational member," and task stories as referring "to an influence set containing the various organizational goals, resources, and rules of the organization as well as those elements necessary to perform the task" (p. 9). Each definition needs to be more specific, so that there is less ambiguity. A relational story might be better defined as one which emphasizes how a person or a group can impact an organizational member or the organization itself or explains relationships between people. Task stories might be better defined as those in which organizational goals, resources, rules, or procedures are of central focus.

The use of Martin's et al. (1983) three dualities also placed limitations on this research. Although these categories are obviously important to organizational members, it is difficult to discern or pinpoint one in each story. In a number of stories, two or more issues seemed to dominate.

Concerns surrounding cross-sectional studies in general also apply to this research. These findings represent a view of the organization studied at one point in time or give us only a "snapshot" view. Some researchers question the usefulness of such findings for interorganizational generalizability.

In addition, this pilot study does not investigate the functions served by organizational stories. It is quite likely that stories are told to serve some underlying function or as a part of a certain strategy for goal achievement.

Despite these limitations, this study is useful because it explores a relatively unexamined phenomenon. It provides information about the nature of story-telling and common stories within a particular organization. In addition, it also examines existing typologies for coding stories and makes recommendations for their improvement. This pilot study lays the groundwork for further story research.

Summary

This pilot study reveals interesting findings concerning the nature and type of organizational stories in a non-profit organization. The phenomenon of story-telling in organizations

is one that for the most part has been neglected by communication researchers. It has only recently been considered an arena for study. More research is needed to fully explore this area of communication. Future research needs to examine variables influencing story-telling, such as socialization, and individual differences. Because this activity frequently occurs in organizations, it is an important area of organizational life for future research to continue.

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Table 1

Story Morals

Moral of Stories	N
1. Problems with Supervisor or Director	21
2. How Goals Were Learned	8
3. Hiring and Promotion Policies	15
4. Need for More Precise Communication	9
5. Image	18
6. Changes	10
7. Grapevine	6
8. Deadlines	3
9. Decision Making	7